A LETTER

FROM THE

Bishop of Rochester,

To the Right Honourable

The Earl of *Dorset* and *Middlesex*,

LORD-CHAMBERLAIN

OF

His MAJESTIES Houshold,

Concerning his Sitting in the

Late Ecclesiastical Commission.

Thomas Spratt

In the Savoy:

Printed by *EDW. JONES.* MDCLXXXVIII.

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From the

Biſhop of *ROCHESTER*,

To the Right Honourable

The Earl of *Dorſet* and *Middleſex*, *&c.*

MY LORD,

I Think I ſhould be wanting to my ſelf at this time, in my own neceſſary Vindication, ſhould I forbear any longer, to give my Friends a True Account of my Behaviour in the late Eccleſiaſtical

Commiſſion. Though I profeſs, what I ſhall now ſay, I only intend as a Reaſonable Mitigation of the Offence I have given, not entirely to Juſtifie my Sitting in that Court; for which, I acknowledge, I have deſervedly incurr'd the Cenſure of many Good Men: And I wiſh I may ever be able to make a ſufficient Amends to my Country for it.

Yet thus much, *My Lord*, I can juſtly alledge for my ſelf, That the Commiſſion was made, and my Name put into it, altogether without my Knowledge; when I hapen'd to be at *Salisbury*, holding an Archiepiſcopal Viſitation with the Biſhop of *Chicheſter*, and other Commiſſioners: Where, by God's Bleſſing, we compoſed ſeveral old Differences and Animoſities, and reſtored Peace and Unity to that Church. At

At my return from thence to *London*, I found I was appointed to be one in a New Commiſſion: But I could never ſee a Copy of it, nor did I ever hear its Contents, or know the Powers granted in it, till the time of its being publicly open'd at *Whitehal*; whither I was ſent for, on purpoſe, in haſte, that very Morning, from my Houſe in the Country; being juſt come home from a Confirmation, and from paying my Duty to Her *Royal Highneſs* the Princeſs of *Denmark* at *Tunbridge*.

Upon the firſt publiſhing the Commiſſion, I confeſs, through my Ignorance in the Laws, I had little or no Objection in my Thoughts againſt the Legality of it; eſpecially when I conſider'd, That having paſt the Broad Seal, it muſt needs, according to my Appre-

apprehenſion, have been examin'd and approved by the King's Learned Council in the Law, Men generally eſteemed of eminent Skill in their Profeſſion. Beſides, I was farther confirm'd (though too raſhly I grant) in my Error, when I ſaw two Gentlemen of the Long Robe, Perſons of the greateſt Place and Authority in *Weſtminſter-Hall*, joyned with us; who, I ſhould have thought, would never have ventur'd their Fortunes and Reputations, by exerciſing a Juriſdiction that was Illegal.

And I believ'd I had Reaſon to conclude, That this very Argument might prevail alſo with ſome others of the Temporal Lords, that ſate among us. Particularly [redacted] the Earl of *Rocheſter* has often aſſur'd me, 'twas that which induc'd him to accept of the Commiſ-

ſion;

ſion ; and that he did it, as I my ſelf did, with a purpoſe of doing as much Good as we were able, and of hindring as much Evil, as we poſſibly could, in that Unfortunate Juncture of Affairs.

As for my own Part, I was ſtartled when I perceived my Lord of *Canterbury* ſcrupled to be preſent with us ; whoſe Example, 'tis true, I ought rather to have followed than the greateſt Lawyers in all Matters of Conſcience. Yet I hope his Grace will excuſe me, if I declare, that I did not at firſt know He made a Matter of Conſcience of it. Nor did I underſtand his Grace took Exception at the Lawfulneſs of the Commiſſion it ſelf, till after my Lord of *London* was Cited, and had Appear'd, and Anſwer'd, and the unjuſt Sentence was paſt againſt him.

For

For it was on the very Day the Commiſſion was open'd, immediately, as I remember, after it was read, that my Lord of *London* was inform'd againſt, for not Suſpending Dr. *Sharp*: Which, though it exceedingly ſurpriz'd me at firſt, yet obſerving with what heat the Proſecution was like to be carryed on againſt him, that very Conſideration did the more incline me to Sit and Act there, that I might be in ſome Capacity of doing Right to his Lordſhip. And whether I did him any Service through the whole Proceſs of his Cauſe, I leave it to my Lord himſelf to judge. That I gave my Poſitive Vote for his Acquittal, Both the Times when his Suſpenſion came in queſtion, I ſuppoſe I need not tell the World.

Having

Having thus, in the beginning of that Court, and the higheſt Ferment of it, freely diſcharg'd my Conſcience, by Endeavouring to clear my Lord of *London*, I muſt own, I thenceforth unawares took a Reſolution, which, how hurtful ſoever it may now prove to my ſelf, yet I am ſtill apt to believe, did the Church of *England* no Diſſervice in the Main. My Deſign, by continuing longer among them, was to make ſure of one Vote at leaſt, and to do my Part, to the utmoſt of my ſmall Intereſt and Ability, to leſſen the Blow which I fear'd was coming on the Clergy, ſince it could not altogether be avoided.

And I was the more perſuaded to take this Courſe, not only becauſe the Legality or Illegality of the Commiſſion ſeem'd at firſt rather a Moot-caſe,

than a determin'd Point either way; divers of the Principal Lawyers, as I was told, being divided in their Opinions concerning it; but also because I saw, some other Persons were ready to fill my Chair there, as soon as it should be empty; Men of whose Principles and Practices I was so well aware, that I knew they would not have the same regard as my self for the Churches Preservation. And perhaps I might add this further for the Extenuation of my Fault, That I was not discouraged by some Grave and Worthy Persons, for this very purpose, to keep in some longer time: But I forbear to name them, that I may not involve any Good Man in my Infelicity.

However, upon these Motives I Acted, and, in pursuance of this Design, God knows, I Voted, as long as

I

I remained at the Board: Where all my Opinions were ſo contrary to the Humour of the Court, that I often thought my ſelf to be really in as much Hazard from the Commiſſion it ſelf, by my not Complying, as any of my Brethren could be, that were out of it.

I Appeal to all that were acquainted with the Tranſactions there, whether ever I gave my Conſent to any Irregular or Arbitrary Sentence; whether I did not conſtantly and firmly Declare againſt every Extravagant Decree. I could almoſt preſume to affirm, That I was, as far as in me lay, ſome way or other, a Common Sollicitor, or Advocate for all that were unjuſtly Proſecuted before them. And I might exemplifie this beyond all Contradiction, if I ſhould enumerate every

particular Cauſe, that came under their Cognizance.

After my Lord of *London* was Sentenced, his Lordſhip knows, *I* was always upon the Watch to obſtruct all farther Proceedings againſt him. Nay, his Lordſhip well remembers, *I* had once obtained to have his Suſpenſion taken off, if he would but have made an ordinary Submiſſion.

Then *I* was Zealous for *Exeter-College*, in their Defence againſt Father *Petre*, in a Buſineſs of ſo great Importance, that if the College had been overcome in the Suit, that whole Society muſt ſoon have been abandoned to Popery.

I did my utmoſt to oppoſe the Violent Perſecution upon the whole Univerſity of *Cambridge*; when the Vice-Chancellor was ſuſpended his Office, and

and his Maſterſhip of *Magdalen-College*, becauſe a Popiſh Prieſt, who was one of the Miſſionaries to pervert the Scholars, was denied a Degree in their Convocation.

I faithfully Aſſiſted and Served *Chriſt-Church* in *Oxford*, when they were in danger of having new Statutes Impoſed upon them, which would Infallibly have laid open that Royal College, to the Ruine of their Good Learning and Religion.

I abſolutely reſiſted all the Alterations in the Statutes of *Sidney-College*, and all other Changes and Abrogations of Oaths, that were then made or deſigned in the Statutes of either Univerſity, for the advantage of Popiſh Prieſts and Students, and for the freer courſe of *Mandamus*'s in their Favour.

I ever gave my Advice for all ſorts of Buſineſs, to be return'd into the common courſe of Juſtice; as that all Eccleſiaſtical Matters ſhould be referred back to the ſeveral Biſhops from whoſe Dioceſes the Complaints were brought; and that all Informations againſt Colleges and Hoſpitals ſhould be recommitted to their proper Viſitors.

I perſiſted unmoveable in my Diſſent from every Vote that paſſed againſt *Magdalen-College* in *Oxford*; from their very firſt Citation before that Court, to the cruel incapacitating of the Preſident and Fellows.

I could mention many other Particulars, wherein I ſucceſsfully labour'd to relieve divers of the inferior and greater Clergy from Oppreſſion; to prevent ſome from being call'd before

us

us at all; to preſerve others after they were accuſed by malicious Sycophants and Informers, that ſwarm'd then every where: Some in the Caſe of Tythes; ſome for preſſing Churchwardens to take Legal Oaths; ſome for not Reading, ſome for Preaching againſt the King's Declaration.

But there are Two Eminent Inſtances, which I cannot omit. The one, That when the Biſhop of *Lincoln* was Petition'd againſt by his Arch-Deacon, and there was, at that time, Inclination enough in the Court to purſue him to Extremity, yet my Lord Biſhop of *Peterburgh*, by interceding for him with the King, and I with the Commiſſioners, ſo effectually wrought, that the Proſecution againſt him was diſcountenanced and fell to the Ground.

The

The other Inſtance concerns my Lord of *Canterbury*; and I am confident his Grace will readily give me this Teſtimony, That I ſerved him honeſtly and induſtriouſly on ſome Occaſions, wherein he was like to be embroiled with the Commiſſion; which muſt inevitably have ended in his Grace's Suſpenſion at leaſt, ſince he was reſolved, whenever he ſhould be brought before them, whatever the Pretence had been, to deny the whole Power and Juriſdiction of the Court.

As for the laſt Scene tranſacted there, which was in Order to Cenſure the whole Clergy, for refuſing to Read the Declaration: In that I hope I need ſay nothing in my Defence, it being publicly known to the whole Nation, how I then demean'd my ſelf; how I broke looſe from the Commiſsion in a time, when

when I was convinced I could do the Church no farther Service there, and when the Popiſh Party was in the height of their Power and Rage. Then it was that I joyned my ſelf again to the Common Intereſt of the honeſt Clergy, juſt when they were on the very Brink of Deſtruction, before we ever dream'd of this Glorious Deliverance.

This is certain, that my leaving and defying the Commiſſion at that time, did apparently exaſperate the Popiſh Prieſts, and the Ring-leaders of the Jeſuitical Faction againſt me, to the higheſt Degree imaginable. Nay, ſome Worthy Men have made me almoſt ſo vain as to fancy, that my bidding the Commiſsion then Farewel in ſo public and peremptory a Manner, was no inconſiderable Stroke towards the Diſſolution of the Commiſsion it ſelf. It is evident, that immediately upon the receit of my Letter, wherein I re-

nounc'd them, they Adjourned in Confuſion for Six Months, and ſcarce ever met afterwards.

Thus far I am ſure, my perpetual Behaviour therein, was ſo much all of a piece, ſo directly againſt the Vogue of the Court, and the Counſels of Popery then prevailing; and the Effects of it did ſo viſibly deſtroy my former Intereſt with the King, that whereas it is manifeſt, I was, when the Commiſsion began, in as fair a probability as any Clergy-Man in *England*, to receive great Effects of His Majeſties Favour; yet after my Oppoſing my Lord Biſhop of *London*'s Suſpenſion, and my other Votes Conformable to that, I fell by Degrees under His ſevere Diſpleaſure.

I might add moreover, that it is very probable, I was at laſt in more imminent Danger than any of my Brethren; I ſay, my Lord, than any of my Brethren, the Seven Petitioning Biſhops, and my Lord of

of *London* only excepted; whoſe Merits and Sufferings, in Aſſerting our Laws and Religion, were ſo conſpicuous, and by conſequence the Fury of the Papiſts againſt them ſo implacable, that perhaps it would be Preſumption in any other Clergy-Man, much more in Me, to come in Competition with Them for either of thoſe Honours.

Upon the whole Matter therefore, tho' as to the Legal Part of the Commiſsion, which belong'd to Lawyers to judge of, I was miſtaken, for Acting in it at all: Yet in the Conſcientious Part, which properly concern'd me as a Divine, to Act in it honeſtly and ſincerely, according to the beſt of my Judgment, in that, if I ſhall not be thought to deſerve Thanks, yet I hope I may obtain Pardon from all Men of Candor and Ingenuity.

My Lord, I know your Lordſhip's Generoſity and Tender Concern for your Friends,

Friends, whereof I have had so much Experience, will excuse me for troubling you with this my long Confession and Apology, for my share in the Ecclesiastical Commission. I wholly submit it to your Lordship's Prudence and Kindness, to make what use of it you please in my behalf. Only, this I will say, That if I had as good a Cause for you to Plead, as I have in your Lordship a Patron to Defend me, I should not have an Enemy in all *England*.

My LORD, I am

Your Lordship's most Faithful,

Westminster, Feb. 21. 1688. *Humble, and Obedient Servant,*

Tho. Rossen.

FINIS.